



The Blue Coat School

www.blue-coat.oldham.sch.uk

Proud to be part of the Cranmer Education Trust

Egerton Street, Oldham OL1 3SQ

Tel: (0161) 624 1484

Email: secretary@blue-coat.org

Headteacher: Mr R Higgins, M.A.

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Dear Parents and Carers,

I hope that you and your families are all safe and well. We know that some families have had a difficult time with illness and bereavements, and we continue to keep you all in our thoughts and prayers.

As expected, the start to this half term has not been without challenge and regrettably, we have already had to ask large cohorts of children to self-isolate across all Year groups. We are doing everything we can to reduce the risks of Covid-19 to pupils, their families and staff. Unfortunately, whilst the virus is so prevalent in the local community, we are likely to continue to experience disruption.

Our systems for track and trace are well established now as hopefully are our methods for communicating with you. I understand that families would like the outcome of any track and trace exercise to be turned around quickly, but I'm sure you can appreciate how complex and time consuming this process can be. We will send any track and trace updates out to families as soon as we have completed them, but can I ask that you give us time to do this and remain patient.

We continue to work closely with Public Health and are advised by them every time we have a case to deal with. We are finding that transmission of Covid-19 is taking place in the wider community, not from within school. The precautions we have taken with our daily arrangements mean that school is as safe for our young people as it possibly can be, and we aim to keep it that way until this pandemic is finally over.

As the transmission is taking place in the wider community, we need everyone's help and support to reduce the disruption to learning our pupils are currently experiencing. We need everybody to follow the guidance. This sounds obvious and straightforward and I realise that I am in danger of repeating myself from previous letters, but unfortunately, this is still not always happening. Many of the cases we have dealt with which have required large cohorts of pupils to isolate would have been avoidable if the Government guidance had been followed.

We really depend on your support with this. **So please, do not send your son/daughter to school if they have:**

- a high temperature – this means feeling hot to touch on your chest or back (you do not need to measure your temperature),
- a new, continuous cough – this means coughing a lot for more than an hour, or 3 or more coughing episodes in 24 hours (if you usually have a cough, it may be worse than usual),
- a loss or change to your sense of smell or taste – this means you've noticed you cannot smell or taste anything, or things smell or taste different to normal.



Additionally, **if anyone else in the family home** displays symptoms, everybody must self-isolate until the poorly family member has returned a negative test result. Even if someone in the household goes for a test as a precaution and you expect the outcome to be negative, the entire household **must** isolate until a negative test result is confirmed.

Whilst this goes against everything we usually say in relation to attendance, if your son/daughter is generally feeling unwell, but they aren't necessarily displaying Covid-19 symptoms, it may be best to keep them off for a day as a precaution. This will ensure that any general illness symptoms (in particular extremely severe headaches), don't transform into Covid-19 symptoms the following day.

Can I ask that everyone also refers to the Government guidance about **not mixing with other families or households**:

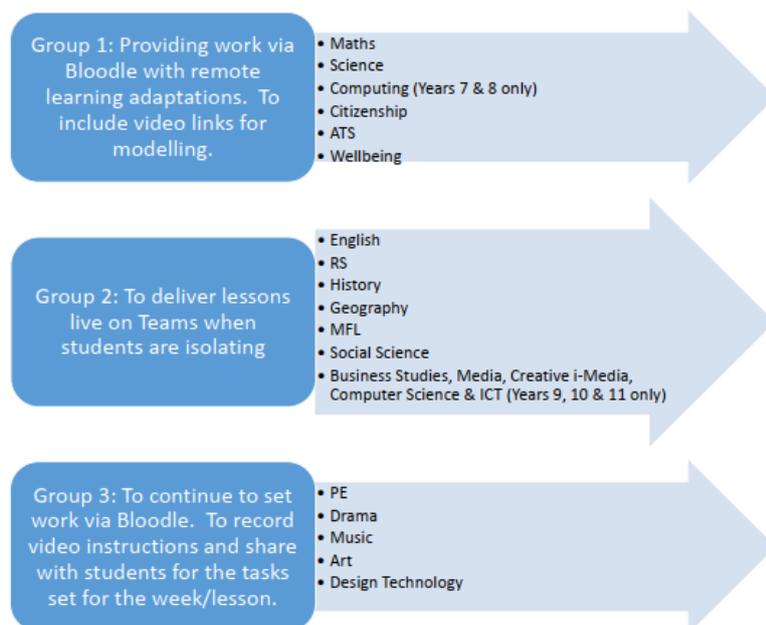
- From 5 November, **you must not meet with another person, outside your household either socially, or to undertake any activities with another person.**
- You should minimise time spent outside your home. When around other people, stay 2 metres apart from anyone not in your household - meaning the people you live with - or your support bubble. Where this is not possible, stay 1 metre apart with extra precautions (eg., wearing a face covering).

Also, when any of our pupils are sent home to isolate, **please can you ensure that they do.** I know this is tough and challenging for everyone but if we don't all follow this guidance our young people are going to continue to experience increased disruption to their learning.

It is vitally important that we all look after and support one another.

Remote Learning - Since the start of this half term, we have made adjustments to our remote learning provision.

When cohorts of children are identified as potential close contacts and are sent home to self-isolate, lessons will be provided in the following ways for Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 students.



For Groups 1 and 3, you will find instructions on how to access BLOODLE by following the link: <https://www.blue-coat.org/school-information/links/bloodle/> These lessons will follow a similar structure to those lessons delivered previously.

For Group 2, lessons will be delivered via Microsoft Teams. Please use the link on the website for instructions on how to access these live lessons (<https://www.blue-coat.org/school-information/links/Microsoft Teams – How to access: written instructions / Video tutorial>).

All Sixth Form lessons will be delivered live, via Microsoft Teams.

The feedback we have received from pupils and parents about this has been very positive and if you need any help logging in to Microsoft Teams or Bloodle, please visit the school website where you will find a set of parental instructions.

Challenges Ahead - We will do everything we possibly can to keep the school open as normal in the months ahead. I do however need to draw your attention to some of the significant challenges we are facing as a school in relation to staffing. The staff at Blue Coat are as exposed to the same rules and guidance about isolation as everyone else. Just as many of you will have already experienced, a number of Blue Coat staff have had to isolate due to their own illness, illness of a family member or being identified as a potential close contact of someone who has tested positive for Covid-19. Increasingly, we are seeing many staff affected by the closure of childcare provision, which can also impact on their ability to attend school as normal.

We are working incredibly hard to manage this and will continue to do so. We have increased our number of regular supply teachers that we call on, and in addition to their normal teaching commitments, staff are also providing frequent cover for absent colleagues. Towards the end of last term, we had over 15 members of staff who were required to isolate for various reasons, which highlights the level of challenge we are facing.

So far, we have managed, and I am confident that we will be able to continue to manage this moving forward. However, if we ever get to the point where staffing levels become dangerously low or unmanageable, we may have to make the decision to ask a Year group to work from home for a short period. This would only be as an absolute last resort and we would communicate this in as much advance as possible. I am hopeful that we will not get to this point, but I need to bring this possibility to your attention.

Snow - As we move into the winter months, it is likely that we will experience some inclement weather and possibly snow. When we get heavy snow, it can cause a significant amount of disruption at Blue Coat. Often travel conditions become long and sometimes impossible for pupils and staff, and we always need to spend a significant amount of time clearing the school site to make it safe and accessible for everyone. Despite these challenges, we usually battle on and do our best to open regardless of whatever Oldham Edge is throwing at us!

However, this does cause significant disruption to learning. Often, we have to collapse and amalgamate classes or move pupils to different classrooms whilst we get the site safe and accessible. In the current climate and with the guidance for the safe opening of schools as it is, it will be impossible for us to make the types of adjustments we usually do. Therefore, if we are experiencing heavy snow in the morning that is making travel to school challenging and likely to cause significant disruption, we will make the decision to close the school. This decision will be made by 6:45am and communicated via MyEd and the school website. Lessons will be provided for



pupils following our current remote learning offer available to pupils when they are required to self-isolate. Hopefully we won't be required to do this but forewarned is forearmed. Please check the school website and your emails in the morning, if we are experiencing heavy snow.

Additional Closures - Just a reminder that as per the school calendar, school will close to pupils at 1:20pm on Friday, 20th November. The early closure was to support with our Speech Night arrangements which unfortunately we have had to cancel this year. We will be communicating the winners of Speech Night prizes over the next few weeks and all prize winners will still receive their certificates and any relevant prizes.

The bus companies have contacted us today to say that they will no longer be able to offer a pickup service at 1.20pm on Friday, 20th November and will be arriving at 3.00pm instead as normal. We are following this up with them as this has been arranged since the start of term with the bus service providers. If any pupils are unable to make their own way home on Friday, we will provide supervision for them in school until the school buses arrive at 3.00pm. If you would like your son/daughter to take advantage of this provision, please complete the link at the bottom of this letter as soon as possible.

A reminder that school is also closed to all pupils on Friday, 4th December as per the school calendar.

Christmas - We are currently on with our preparations for Christmas and it is our plan to provide pupils with the same Blue Coat Christmas experience as in previous years. We don't doubt how hard this year has been for our young people and we want to provide them with something to look forward to and to remember. Advent is when we welcome the light into the darkness, so as well as providing the pupils with the opportunity to reflect, we will also be providing them with the opportunities to come together and celebrate as a school community.

Obviously, things will look slightly different to previous years, but the children will still experience our Advent Communion, Carol Service, Christmas Lunch, Staff Pantomime and Talent Show. More details will follow closer to the time but despite the pandemic, hopefully we will be able to celebrate Christmas together as a faith community.

Thank you for your continued help and support. It is much appreciated.

Yours sincerely,



Mr R. Higgins
Headteacher
The Blue Coat School

